

In Sickness | August 9, 2019

THE DOCTOR-PATIENT RELATIONSHIP

© Courtney Jensen | <https://courtneyjensen.com/>

The doctor-patient relationship is a precious bond. There's comfort in being known. There's healing in that comfort.

When I first became sick, I would arrive at the hospital in pain, confused, terrified.

Then the doctor would enter my room and begin to ask me questions.

I would respond. He would interpret those responses, and I could see what looked like a calculating mind solving the riddles and equations as they were being presented to him.

And then: "Problem solved."

Those exact words wouldn't leave his mouth, but I could always see them on his face. And I wasn't misinterpreting anything. "Problem solved" was communicated to me very clearly in American Brow Language.

The moment I saw it, I would be overcome with a sensation stronger than relief.

"Finally."

That's the thought that appeared on *my* face. Because finally, I was going to get better. This man (or sometimes, but fewer times, woman) will fix this. They'll make it go away. And then I can get past it. Finally. It's finally over.

Basking in this reassurance, I would answer a few more of the doctor's questions.

Formalities. Pleasantries. But no curiosities. Because the diagnosis was already made.

Then I'd be given discharge papers. And a prescription to fill, which I would fill urgently and take expectantly.

The next day, I would take it a few minutes ahead of schedule.

The day after that, a few *more* minutes ahead of schedule.

And then a few more.

Eventually, I had to set an earlier alarm.

That's when I realized nothing was changing. I wasn't getting better. Either the diagnosis or the treatment was wrong.

I would resolve to finish the bottle, but I wouldn't be setting any more alarms.

Days would pass. Maybe a week. Sometimes two weeks. Then I'd be back in front of the doctor. A different doctor. A new one. Again, usually a man. And this new man would quickly tuck my anxiety in for bed. "It's time to rest, worries. Just go to sleep. I'll take it from here."

Those were the brows he donned as he asked his questions and listened to my answers.

"Finally," I would think in such a way that reveals I'm genuinely re-re-reassured.

I actually believe it. Every time. Doctor after doctor. I believe it completely.

And then I believe it a little less.

And then I believe it a little less.

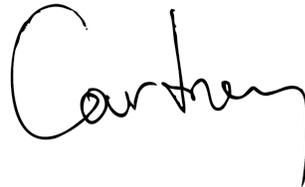
And then I stop believing it altogether.

And then I stop believing doctors altogether... as a rule, like a type of cultural profiling. Like an inner-city teenager's distrust of cops.

It doesn't stop there. Soon, I can no longer conceal my disappointment in the doctors' diagnoses or my skepticism in their prescriptions.

That's when the doctors start to see me like how an inner-city police officer sees a shifty-eyed juvie.

That's when I knew I was not going to get well.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Courtney". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial 'C'.